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THE BETTING BOOK AT BROOKS'S.

BY G. S. STREET.

OF all the pleasures that come of an interest in letters or history, the greatest, I think, is the inspection of "original documents"; and the greatest in that kind which I myself have had was experienced when, by an especial favor, of which I here make my most sincere acknowledgments, I was allowed to study and make extracts from the Betting Book at Brooks's Club. I propose to repeat some of these extracts—some only, for limits of space prevent my giving all, and discretion prevents my giving a particular few; to copy out bets which reflect the character of a profoundly interesting society; which show the real opinions of contemporary politicians about political chances—in particular of the chances of a certain War in America; which were made by men bearing some of the most famous names in our history—in our common history, for most of these bettors were men before the War of Independence; or which are merely curious in themselves.

I fancy that most of these bets will carry their own significance to my readers without comment of mine. Not to be a mere copyist, however, I will inflict on them a few words of introduction and general explanation. Brooks's Club, which was originally called Almack's but was quite distinct from the Assembly Rooms of that name, was formed in 1764. It was not a political club then. It first took on a political complexion in 1782, when Charles James Fox was on the eve of important office, and was sought after by place hunters and political friends and intriguers. They had to seek him in his haunts, and his favorite haunt was Brooks's, where he was (for once in his life) positively making money—by a faro bank. George Selwyn notes the circumstance in one of his letters to Lord Carlisle. "I own that

to see Charles closeted every instant at Brooks's by one or the other, that he can neither punt or deal for a quarter of an hour but he is obliged to give an audience * * * is to me a scene *la plus parfaitement comique que l'on puisse imaginer*, and to nobody it seems more risible than to Charles himself." It was, in fact, a gambling club, exclusive, and consisting almost entirely of that happy family which was English society at the time, but a gambling club still; and if most of the bets, even of the earlier bets, dealt with politics, it was because those gamblers happened to govern England.

The first bet is recorded in 1771. From then to 1800, the bets are constant. Then they slacken, and those after 1814—almost entirely political and for small sums—fill but a fifth of the book. Sir George Trevelyan has remarked on the strange epitome of two ages to be found in this club, as it is and as it was a hundred years ago. There is an old print of the large drawing room, with a crowd of punters round the big table and a few detached couples playing piquet about the room. Looking into that room now, one admires its grave and solemn dignity—perhaps one sighs. A member might go into it and read the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW undisturbed. The change is reflected in the betting book. A few stray political bets in the last fifty years, obviously made not in the least for the sake of the small sums staked, but as a sort of humorous memento of a discussion, one or two social bets to make some nominal continuity of an old custom—that is all. The later political bets are sometimes of great interest—I shall give some as late as 1852—but the old spirit is gone. Sir George Trevelyan, if I remember rightly, takes occasion to reflect ethically on the change. So will not I: enough to confess that the time of Charles Fox (provided that I had been in his set) would have pleased me better. One may gamble and carouse, if one has the mind, even now, but not with wits and statesmen.

The soul and spirit of that earlier time was Charles Fox, of course, that amazing genius and prodigal—scholar, wit, statesman, gambler, rake, affectionate husband, and the best loved man of his time. I imagine him dealing the cards at the large table, with his swarthy face and black eyebrows and ample waistcoat, with the unquestioned stamp of thought and command in all his aspect, and with the humorous twinkling eyes which tell of the

man innately *volage*, forever the child and victim of free-living impulse. Those of my readers who visit London should mark the fine picture of him in the National Portrait Gallery; there is none more interesting there. Next him sits his partner in the bank and lifelong intimate, Fitzpatrick, who died a general and was called "Beau Richard"; Hare, "the Hare of many friends"; Storer, famous for his good manners, their savior, perhaps; the last Duke of Queensberry, "Old Q."; General Burgoyne, the wit and man of fashion, back from his unlucky campaign against the American colonists; the second Lord Bolingbroke, "Bully," and his brother, Captain St. John, "The Baptist"; Sheridan—I might go on forever. George Selwyn, everybody's friend and counsellor, stands apart, half scandalized and half amused. But I must come to the bets.

They are all contained in one book, the size of an ordinary, thick notebook, on rough paper with gilt edges. The book, however, consists of two, bound in handsome red together. Some ten pages at the beginning of the second part are copies from the first part—why made and when, history sayeth not. But in all the rest of the book, the bets are made in the handwriting of one or the other bettor—possibly, in a few instances, by an obliging friend. It was a joy to me to observe the various handwritings—the easy, rapid writing of men who wrote a good deal; the clumsy, laborious writing of fingers more familiar with guns and bridle-reins; the hasty scrawl of the man who was in a hurry to be at play; sometimes the fantastic scrawl of the man who had plainly dined. Charles Fox's fist changes in the progress of the book from a rather round and boyish form to an elegant and running hand—an improvement no doubt produced by the lessons we know he took from a writing-master. He and Fitzpatrick used the book most constantly; after 1780, Sheridan's nimble flourish decorates a good many pages. I preserve spelling and other accidents, and refrain from impertinent and unnecessary "*sics*." The majority of the bets are not signed or initialled, nor is the settlement recorded: Sheridan (in pride, it may have been, of winning or paying) seems first to have introduced the latter custom.

It is convenient to make a few rough divisions. I propose to take first the period up to 1810 or so, to exhaust the Fox generation, and give (1.) Bets interesting on social grounds, or for the names put to them, (2.) Bets referring to the American War of

Independence, and (3.) Other political bets. And I shall add (4.) Some political bets of a later date.

I.

"1771. April 16th. Ld. Ossory betts Mr. C. Fox 100 Guineas to 10 that Doctor North is not Bishop of Durham this day two months, provided the present Bishop dies within that time."

That is the fourth bet in the book, Fox's first appearance, and an indication of his praiseworthy interest in the Church. The next bet is less edifying, though a sign of artistic interests:

"1771. June 22nd. Mr. William Hanger betts Mr. Lee Twenty Guineas to 25 that M^{lle}. Heinel does not dance in England at the Opera House next Month."

The next but one:

"Mr. Boothby gave Mr. Fawkener five Guineas to receive One Hundred if the Duke of Queensbury dies before half an Hour after five of the afternoon of the 27 of June 1773. June 27: 1772."

This is a very frequent sort of bet: that So-and-so will die before somebody else, that So-and-so will be alive in ten years' time—the rather gloomy subject is always coming up. So is the subject of marriage, sometimes, as in the case of the bet next given, denoting an anti-nuptial determination:

"2nd March 1774. Lord Northington betts Mr. Plumer 300 Guineas: to 50: that either the Duke of Devonshire, Lord Cholmondeley, Mr. Hanger, or Mr. Plumer is married before His Lordship."

In 1774 came Fox's great financial crash. He was twenty-five years old. His elder brother's wife had borne a son, and the Jews, perceiving that the hope of his succession to the immense fortune of his father, Lord Holland, was gone, refused to wait any longer. Lord Holland, the most generous, if not the most judicious, father in history, paid £140,000 for Charles. Odds were laid against Charles's retrieving a sound financial position.

"March 21, 1774. Almack's. Lord Clermont has given Mr. Crawford ten guineas upon the condition of receiving £500 from him, whenever Mr. Charles Fox shall be worth 100,000£ clear of debts."

(This is the "Fish Crawford" of the Selwyn Letters. He was a friend of Hume and of Madame du Deffand. I must here acknowledge, not for the first time, my obligations to the excellent edition of Selwyn's Letters edited by Mr. Roscoe and Miss Clergue). As for Charles, he said he was sorry and proposed to make a fortune at the bar. Whereupon:

"Mr. Burgoyne betts Mr. C. Fox 50 gs. that Ld. Cholmondeley, Ld.

Northington, D. of Leinster & Ld. Coleraine are all married or dead before Mr. C. Fox is called to the Barr."

We shall hear of Mr. Burgoyne in a different connection: the insertion of the afterthought "or dead" shows a caution which should have made him a more successful general. Follow bets on the number of people present at the Pantheon one night (the Opera House which was built in 1772 and burnt in 1792), on the validity of marriages performed by a person not a clergyman, on Lord Carlisle's going to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant, on who would get the garter, on skill in shooting, on deaths and marriages and the average weight of sheep, and on the fate of the Perreau brothers, who were executed for forgery. A more famous forger, Dr. Dodd, who forged Lord Chesterfield's name and whose great influence nearly rescued him, is the subject of another. A curious sort of bet which often occurs is, that such and such a famous man, presumably obnoxious to the wagerer, will be hanged before somebody else—obviously a means of expressing dislike.

"Almacks, March 6. 1776.

"Mr. C. Turner betts Mr. E. Fawkener 90 gs. that Ld. North falls by the hands of Justice before Mr. Hancock president of the Continental Congress to be determined in three years from the date hereof."

"Mr. W. Hanger betts Mr. Fox fifty guineas Mr. Fox has the gout before Mr. Hanger."

That was in 1779, but it is gratifying to remember that Fox made up for the ravages of Brooks's by a few weeks' shooting every year. Sheridan was elected to Brooks's on November 2d, 1780, after prolonged opposition by the Duke of Queensberry and George Selwyn; and on March 2d, 1781, appears his first bet—about a certain murderer's confessing. Selwyn—I jump about, I know, but a minute system is impossible—appears only once in the book, and then the bet was disputed.

"Mr. Selwyn betts Mr. FitzPatrick 5 gs. that he is Surveyor of Crown Lands this day 12 months.

"Dec. 27th 1783."

"A Bubble Bett Mr. Selwyn betted that he was Surveyor only meaning Surveyor in the Mint."

As a matter of fact, Pitt gave Selwyn the sinecure in question in 1784.

"March 24 1794.

"Mr. Fox betts Mr. Thompson 60 to 50 that Mr. Sheridan is not married on or before 26th March 1795."

This bet is interesting, for the subject (Sheridan) was married to the daughter of Dean Ogle on April 27th, 1795, and for the reappearance of Fox after a considerable interval, due to his retirement abroad with Mrs. Armistead, whom he married.*

Some time in 1783—presumably February 4th—Fox took a bet of two hundred guineas to ten against his going to America “before the fourth of February, 1785.” So far as I know, the intention which, more or less, he must have conceived is not otherwise recorded: one imagines that he, the consistent supporter of the American cause, would have had a great reception. A marriage bet which concerned a more highly placed, though less interesting, personage than Sheridan occurred in 1795 or 1796.

“*Ld. Ossory and Ld. R. Seymour have given one guinea each to the Duke of Clarence on condition that the Duke gives each of them 100 guineas on the day following His Royal Highness's Marriage.*”

One wonders if he remembered the circumstance when, being heir-presumptive to the throne, he married the Princess Adelaide in 1818.

“*July 4th 1796.*

“*Mr. J. M. Smith has given Mr. Ed^d. Fawkenor one guinea to receive ten guineas, when Mr. Beckford of Fonthill be made an English Peer.*”

His eccentricities considered, these seem very short odds against the amazing author of “*Vathek*”; but at the time of the bet he was still in possession of his father's (Alderman Beckford, Pitt's friend) vast fortune. Another remarkable person of the Regency comes up in 1807, when a bet was made about Beau Brummell's going as secretary to Constantinople; and in 1795 appears Lord Hertford's name—Lord Hertford, the most famous profligate of his time, the original of Thackeray's Lord Steyne, and the man who began that wonderful collection which is now, with Hertford House, the property of the nation.

I have given no horse-racing or gambling bets as yet, but they are all, or nearly all, of an inevitably commonplace character. In pre-bookmaker days, there was, of course, a good deal of betting on horse-races in the clubs, but there are far fewer in this book than in that of White's, an institution which was frequented in preference by that pillar of the turf, “*Old Q.*” Probably, too, most of the bets were made on the course. The usual form of

*See the Rev. W. Hunt's life of him in the Dictionary of National Biography.

gambling bet was for a man to wager that he would not lose above a certain sum at a sitting, a sort of additional inducement to play carefully. One of these bets defines the sitting as "from dinner to dinner," which reminds one—we must not be too proud of our virtues—of certain lengthy games of poker which have been played on trans-Atlantic voyages. Only the poker-players were not Foreign Secretaries and Leaders of the Opposition. Sometimes a man would effect a sort of inverted insurance, by wagering a large sum against his playing at all. One may mention, in this connection, an odd sort of bet in which a man would lay heavy odds against his doing something which it was absolutely in his power to do or to leave undone. Thus:

"Sir G. Webster gives Lord Derby one guinea to receive one Hundred Guineas, when Ld. Derby goes up in a Ballon one Hundred yards from the Surface of the Earth. 6th Dec. 1783."

One can understand that Lord Derby should have wished to protect himself against the temptation to go ballooning; but it is difficult to see why Sir G. Webster should have parted with his guinea, unless he was convinced that Lord Derby was a balloon-maniac or kindly wished to save his lordship from himself.

II.

But I must come now to more important themes. The first bet which bears on the American War was made on December 13th, 1774, when "Ld. Bolingbroke betts Mr. Fox 150, to 50, that the Tea Act is not repealed this Session." Four months later occurred the first engagement between the Americans and His Majesty's forces, and from then to the peace, in 1783, bets on the subject occur at intervals. They begin, of course, with confidence in the might of Great Britain; that was to be expected. What is more remarkable is the calmness with which the whole business was evidently regarded at Brooks's. America was a long way off in those days, and the war then was one of many topics of interest. Even Fox, who must have realized the issues—and who, by the way, consistently bet on the colonists' success—was not too much absorbed to turn at once to a question of cards. Thus:

"March 11th 1776.

"Mr. Sheldon betts Mr. Charles Fox fifty guineas that Peace is made with America before this day two years."

Immediately underneath is a bet obviously made at the same time:

"Mr. Fox has given a guinea to Mr. Crofts & is to receive fifty whenever Mr. Crofts forgets two by honours in Mr. Fox's presence."

It is easy to draw a contrast between this indifference and the strenuousness of the American leaders: it is easy, and I will not seek to defend those Georgian great men at Brooks's. But their point of view was natural. In license and security, they were so many kings; they governed England with one hand and threw dice with the other; authority came too easily to them to admit of a right perspective of responsibility. One should reflect on the fair side of things, and in place of condemning their faults imagine for one's pleasure the charm of this union of the great with the trivial—a charm which no English society is likely to create again. But to resume.

"Lord Stavordale bets Mr. Fox 20 guineas that Genl. Burgoyne is not in England by ye first of March 1776."

Lord Stavordale won this bet, of course. It was on October 17th, 1777, that General Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga: in 1779, we find him at Brooks's again, betting with Lord Edward Bentinck about the number of nights Lord Edward should sup at Vauxhall.

In March, 1776:

"Mr. Charles Turner betts Ld. Nottingham five & twenty guineas that Quebec is now, or will be before the 1st of January 1777 in the Hands of the Provisional Army, supposing no Peace concluded."

Here, for once in a way, the man who backed the English won.

"Aug. 19th 1776.

"Mr. Fox bets Ld. Bolingbroke Five guineas that America does not belong to the King of Great Britain this day two years."

"Mr. Boothby bets Mr. Townshend 50 gs. that the American War is over before Christmas 1779, without America's being independent of the crown of Great Britain.

"June 29th (1777)."

"26th Dec. 1779.

"Mr. Elliot bets Lord George Cavendish five guineas that before the first of January 1781 the Colonies will have given up their claim of Independence."

"Lord Clermont betts General Bourgoine one hundred guineas that a peace is made between Gr. Britain & several of the American colonies—without allowing their independency, before ye 13 day of Janry, 1785.

"Janry 13, 1780."

These bets on the general upshot need no comment. The last bet on the subject tacitly signalizes the fact that a new nation was in existence.

"Mr. Sheridan bets Mr. Fitzpatrick 10 gs. to 2 that the United States of America have six ships of the Line at sea within three years.

"Janry 24th 1783. Won by Col Fitzpatrick."

III.

In domestic politics, one finds, as one would expect, that most of the bets were on matters of personal detail—who would get such and such a place, and the like. Many, also, which illustrate the party manoeuvres of the time, the various attacks of the Opposition and various dissolutions of Parliament, have little interest except to the professed student of the period. But, every now and then, there is a bet which takes one back to larger or more striking events; and, outside domestic politics, there are bets which show something of Great Britain's vital struggle with her enemies, and of what was thought of the chances of foreign affairs. I will give these in their own order.

"March 11th 1776

"Ld. Bolingbroke gives a guinea to Mr. Ch: Fox, & is to receive a thousand from him, whenever the Debt of this country amounts to 171 millions. Mr. Fox is not to pay the 1000, till He is one of His Majesty's Cabinet."

In 1786, the National Debt was £268,000,000; it is not recorded if Lord "Bully" was paid. Fox made another very speculative bet in 1777.

"Mr. Fox has given Mr. Shirley ten guineas to receive five hundred whenever Turkey in Europe belongs to European Power or Powers."

"Ld. Derby betts Mr. Townshend fifty guineas that Ld. Chatham is dead this day fortnight.

"April 7th (1778)."

This bet was made on the same day that Chatham had his fatal fit in the House of Lords, while speaking on behalf of America. He lingered, however, till the 11th of May, so that Mr. Townshend—the "Tommy" of the lines on Burke—won.

"Lord Milford betts Ld Worthington ten guineas to fifty guineas that the French make an actual landing of one thousand men in Great Britain or Ireland before the 1st of November next.

"May 15th 1779."

That reads somewhat strangely to us now; but, by July of the same year, the odds against the French landing had fallen from

five-to-one to evens! One must allow these wagerers some credit for coolness; they would have bet on the result if the French had been marching on London.

"Mr. Fitzpatrick bets Gen^l Burgoyne & Mr. Crewe 20 gs. that L^d Rockingham is first L^d of the Treasury at the meeting of Parliament after Easter.

"15th March 1782."

Mr. Fitzpatrick knew. Lord North resigned on the 20th of this month and Lord Rockingham took office on the 25th, with Charles Fox (who had been sold-up less than a year before, while all the world watched his furniture being carried into St. James's Street, he laughing with the rest) for his Foreign Secretary.

"Sr Godfrey Webster bets Sr Charlton Leighton five guineas that the present Paymaster, Mr. Rigby, has not settled his accounts as Paymaster this day five years.

"March 22nd 1782."

That was the advantage of being Paymaster: you postponed settling your accounts until you had made a fortune by the use of the country's millions. Lord Holland, Fox's father, did this.

About the same time Lord Derby took a bet of five to one, in hundreds (guineas), that England would not have to give Gibraltar to Spain in a year. Gibraltar was besieged, as we know, all this time by the French and Spaniards in great force; but Lord Derby lost his hundred guineas.

"18 March 1784.

"The Duke of Queensberry bets Mr. Crewe 50 gs. that Mr. Fox is not returned member for Westminster.

"paid March 23rd 1785."

This was the celebrated election in which the Duchess of Devonshire canvassed for Fox, and is said to have bought a vote with a kiss. The lapse of time before the bet was paid was due to the scrutiny, about which there was a struggle in Parliament for two sessions.

"Mr. Sheridan betts Mr. Stepney an hundred guineas to five that the King of France is not absolute Jan. 1 1791.

"Won by Mr. Sheridan.

"pd."

The bet needs no comment; nor does one, also curious, made by Fitzpatrick, that the slave trade would be abolished "before Episcopacy;" that was in 1792, some five years after the subject was first raised. In 1794, when Horne Tooke was sent to the Tower on a charge of high treason, there were bets on his being

hanged, Fitzpatrick betting that he would be hanged "before Mr. Pitt." A curious bet was made in 1794. Col. Tarleton, carried away, it is to be supposed, by military enthusiasm, took a bet of a thousand to one against his leading "the advanced party of the combined army in the suburbs of Paris before December next." In the same year is mention of one of the most famous trials in history.

"Genl. Fitzpatrick bets Mr. Grey 10 guineas to one that Mr. Hastings is found guilty upon some part of the charges against him."

IV.

From this time the bets are scanty. The Regency men gambled as deeply as the earlier set at Brooks's, but the betting habit, or at least the habit of betting about everything, seems to have waned. But still, at intervals, the bets remind one of the progress of great events.

In January, 1811, the betting on George the Third's recovery was even. On the 9th of April, 1814, there was a bet of twenty-five to fifty "that the various Paintings Sculptures and Works of Art which have been seized and brought to Paris during the Revolution will in the course of 12 months be presented to England," a confidence in the gratitude of the other nations which was not justified. On the 22d of March, 1815, there was a bet of a hundred to ten against Louis XVIII. or any Bourbon being reinstated in the course of twelve months.

The Catholic Question produced a bet that it would be lost in the session of 1828, and the Corn Act of 1828 an elaborate bet about the amount of imported wheat, made by the statesman, Lord Althorp.

"Mr. C. Fortescue bets Lord Durham 2 ponies to one that Louis Napoleon will still be at the head of the French Government this day 3 years.

"May 28th 1852."

Two other bets in this year are interesting.

"Mr. Bulteel bets Mr. L. Agar Ellis a poney that the present Chancellor of the Exchequer dies a radical."

That was during Lord Derby's administration, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer was Benjamin Disraeli. And this:

"Mr. Cadogan gives Mr. R. E. Alston 5£ on condition that Mr. R. G. Alston returns £150 to Mr. Cadogan when there is an Electric Telegraphic Communication between the Continent of America and Great Britain."

There are no bets on the Crimea, on the Mutiny, the Reform Bill or the Repeal of the Corn Laws. The Civil War in America produced a bet of two to one "that England is not at war with the Confederate States within two years after their recognition by the Federal Government." I conclude with a bet on another trial, rather less important, it is true, than that of Warren Hastings, but one which probably caused as much excitement in its time. One member bet another a guinea to a pound "that the claimant in the Tichborne case does not win the cause."

And here I end. There are other bets of interest, but they are of too recent date to give—a private matter altogether. There is no harm in disclosing the private affairs of Charles Fox, but I should be the last person in the world to tell what statesman bet another a bottle of wine in the year 1900. And, after all, it is the earlier time that attracts one in such a connection. I think of Charles Fox, between a brilliant speech on great matters in the House of Commons and a night at faro, pausing to write down a bet in this book; I rejoiced to read the actual page, and I trust it will not be time thrown away even to read the extract. I imagine a crowd standing round him as he writes—a crowd of men whom Walpole and Selwyn and Selwyn's correspondents have made as well known to me as my own acquaintance—better, it is probable, in many ways. But through them all it is Fox himself who rules one's fancy, that strange triumph of intellect over temperament and of temperament over intellect. This record of his private habits and opinions—for such is half of the book—is a priceless possession. Once more I express my thanks for having seen it.

G. S. STREET.